

Bullocks-Wilshire Department Store
3050 Wilshire Boulevard
Los Angeles
Los Angeles County
California

HABS No. CA-1941

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56 -

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

BULLOCKS-WILSHIRE DEPARTMENT STORE HABS NO. CA-1941

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Location: 3050 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California.

Present owner Bullock's Magnin, Inc.
601 Westmoreland Avenue
Los Angeles, California 90005

Present Occupant Bullock's Wilshire Department Store

Significance The Bullocks-Wilshire Department Store was built in 1928 as the first department store outside the main downtown business district of Los Angeles. In opening this 'branch' department of his downtown store, John C. Bullock helped to facilitate the expansion of the Los Angeles business district from downtown Los Angeles to the Wilshire district. The building was designed by John and Donald Parkinson, well known Los Angeles architects, and is the best remaining example of Art Deco in the area.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1928.
2. Architect: John and Donald Parkinson.
3. Builders, suppliers: Architectural woodwork: Graves Sash and Door.Co., Los Angeles.
Terra-cotta: Gladding-McBean, Los Angeles.
Marble foyer: Feil and Paradise, Los Angeles
Iron and Bronze: A. J. Bayer, Co.

4. Alterations and additions:

1953: Welton Becket & Associates, Los Angeles, added a three story steel-framed addition on the south side which filled in a U-shaped court. The porte cochere was closed in; a two story parking structure was erected on the parking lot to the south of the building. The first and second floors remain almost unchanged; the third and fourth floors have been redivided and redecorated several times. Those exterior alterations made remain in character with the original design and the street-level facades and profile appear unaltered.

B. Historical Context:

John G. Bullock built his first department store at 7th and Broadway Streets (the downtown Los Angeles business district) in 1906. Twenty-two years later he built the Bullocks-Wilshire Store on Wilshire Boulevard, effectively redirecting the business district in Los Angeles. The building, designed by Parkinson and Parkinson, a well known Los Angeles firm, was referred to, by contemporary news accounts as a temple to merchandizing. Bullocks-Wilshire was one of the first stores in the Wilshire area to provide a dual frontage: one on Wilshire, providing advertizing to automobile traffic, and one facing the large parking area on the rear, which is the main entrance. It was one of the first stores to establish what were virtually separate stores within each department. An entire ensemble could be purchased without leaving a particular department (Bullock's has always prided itself on designer labels, in 1969 the store exclusively introduced the ready-to-wear collections of Givenchy and Phillippe Venet to the western United States.) A great amount of money was expended on construction: display cases were made of English Laurel and rosewood, the chandeliers were crystal and foyer walls of rose marble. The original interior shops were designed by Feil and Paradise, noted interior decorators, in collaboration with Jock Peters. There are many original art works: in the motor-court entrance is a ceiling mural depicting the evolution of transportation by Herman Sachs; Gjura Stojano's relief sculpture "The Spirit of Sports" hangs in the Sportshop; a painted glass ceiling by Herman Sachs rises above the Tearoom; and there are other decorations by Mayer Krieg, David Collins, George de Winter and John Wever.

Prepared by:
Eleni Silverman
Historian, HABS
4/20/84

Part II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

- A. General Statement: Bullock's Wilshire, designed by John and Donald Parkinson and built 1928-1929, is an excellent example of the "setback" school of the 1920's as applied to a luxury department store.
- B. Condition of fabric: The building is in excellent condition and very well maintained.
- C. Description of Exterior:
 - 1. Overall dimensions: 290' from north to south and 150' from east to west.

2. Number of bays: There are 13 bays from east to west, and 7 bays from north to south.
- 3 Number of stories: There are 5 stories of the department store area, a sixth floor for mechanical equipment and a 241' tower east of the center of the north facade.

The following documentation was developed by ^{the} Project Supervisor for the HABS Southern California Project II:

Layout, shape: The original plan was L-shaped with the long leg to the North, the short leg to the east. The void was at the SW corner. The L was filled in 1953 by a three story addition thus creating a rectangular plan. The building is relatively low compared to its width and there is an ascending sequence of roof levels from the second floor to the sixth, culminating in the tower. The result is an exciting silhouette.

Foundations: Concrete

Wall Construction, finish, and color:

The walls are of brick covered with a buff colored terra cotta tile applied to the exterior for the piers and horizontal bands above the 1st floor. The terra cotta surface advances in step-like fashion around the piers tending to emphasize the verticality of the facade. A black marble base encircles the building. Copper spandrel panels fill the spaces between the terra cotta piers at each level from the 2nd floor up.

the copper panels have a saw tooth termination at the top of each bay. The top of the tower is finished in copper. The addition to the SW is of buff colored brick to relate to the terra cotta surface treatment of the original structure.

Structural system, framing:

The building is constructed with a steel frame with reinforced concrete and brick added for fireproofing. The building is then sheathed in terra cotta.

Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc.:

There is a large porte cochere to the south which provides access from the parking facilities on that side. This is an open air structure and is finished in terra cotta. Its ceiling is finished with a large fresco painting which depicts the latest in modes of transportation in 1928. The main entrance with a large square headed opening and recessed doorway is located in the 4th bay from the east on the north facade (Wilshire Blvd side). This is the tower bay. There is a bulkhead over the secondary door in the 1st bay from the west on the north facade. There are projecting black metal canopies above the ground floor show windows.

Chimneys:

The chimney stack for the original oil furnace was located atop the six story portion to the south of the building. It is no longer used.

Openings - Doorways, Doors:

The main entry is in the tower bay on the north facade (4th bay from east corner). The doors are set in metal frames and are metal with glass panels. Over the glass is a dense metal grille, the pattern of which is composed of curved and layered strips resembling a fountain or fan configuration. Atop the doorway is a large panel of glass.

A secondary doorway is in the 1st bay from the west on the north front. This door is similar to the main entrance doors but lacks the grille covering.

There are no entrances on the East and west.

The main south entry is through the porte cochere described above. The doors are metal with glass panels which have a plaid type patterning contrasting plain and frosted glass. A service entrance is located in the 7th bay from the west on the south facade, and a truck delivery entrance is in the sixth bay from the west.

- Windows:

Ground floor windows on the North, East, 4 bays of West, and 1 bay of South facades are large plate glass show windows. All upper windows are standard casement sash with frosted glass. On the 2nd floor they are 3(w) x 4(h) lights; on the 3rd floor and above they are 3 x 3 lights. Each major bay is divided into two window bays by a vertical terra cotta strip. (on the south, the 10th bay is divided into 3 window bays by two strips. This is the bay corresponding to the tower bay on the north facade.)

Roof- shape, covering:

The multi-level roof of composition material ascends in stages toward the 6 story mechanical story. The roof sections are flat. There is a roof terrace in the southeast corner.

-cornice, eaves, parapet:

The walls rise past the roof creating a parapet on all levels.

-towers: The tower in the 4th bay of the north elevation rises 241' above the street.

External decorative features:

The main (Wilshire) entrance has a bas relief panel, of human figures making offering, over the doorway. Over the door is the inscription: TO BUILD A BUSINESS THAT WILL NEVER KNOW COMPLETION. There is a wrought iron grille over the doors (mentioned previously). At the third floor level and each subsequent floor are copper spandrel panels which have star-like pattern of concentric 8 pointed figures. Each bay is terminated by a copper panel with a chevron motif at the top edge. Each pier appears to be built up in layers the stepped planes emphasizing the verticality of the facade. The verticality is slowed near the top by the chevron motif similar to the panels.

The porte cochere has a fresco painting depicting the latest in modes of transportation as of 1929. The god Mercury is in the center of the composition.

The gate to the garage (east side) has terra cotta piers flanking a wrought iron gate. The gates to the pedestrian passage to the sides are also wrought iron having a sunburst motif with angular and curvilinear designs.

Other lesser significant details include terra cotta grilles over opening in the south wall, the texture of the terra cotta panels, and the metal window frames.

The tower is finished in copper which reflects the patterning of the copper elsewhere.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERIOR

The plans of the building are not established on a formal basis. The major rooms open one onto another. Several smaller areas fill up the residual spaces of each level. In general the open rooms are for limited merchandise display. All wrapping and sales areas are off the main spaces.

The most formal portion of the building takes place adjacent to the elevator lobby. On the main floor the elevator lobby (which is also the area for toiletries sales) passes through the entire building from south to north. On the north end are six elevators (three on either side of the elevator lobby). To the east of this space is the area for the sales of accessories. To the immediate right of the lobby is the area for the sale of sportswear. Continuing westward, the strong order of the plan dissolves into an accumulation of smaller sales areas including: riding, stationery, antiques, etchings, a gift shop, the boys shop, and mens shop. In the original plan there was a patio on the south side and a playground in the SW corner.

The second floor has three main sections for sales. In the northeast corner and on the east side are two rooms finished in eighteenth century french manner. The merchandise shown here are evening and day wear.

The lingerie display area is to the west of the lobby.

To the far west are private offices and staff areas.

The third and fourth floors are somewhat more informal, designed to appeal to the younger patrons.

The fifth floor houses the restaurant and other dining rooms. The major "tea room" lies directly north of the lobby with another large room to the west. Along the east are several smaller rooms.

The basement is not a merchandizing floor. It is composed of the business offices directly off the lobby and personnel adjacent to it. The remainder of the level is used for storage and for mechanical equipment.

Stairways, elevators:

There is an external fire escape on the south wall.

The main stairway is located at the south end of the elevator lobby. 44 risers (7" with 11 $\frac{1}{4}$ " tread) connect the 1st & 2nd floors; 34 connect 2nd & 3rd; 27 connect 3rd & 4th; 27 connect 4th & 5th. The stairways have steel risers and concrete treads with a steel toe. The handrails are wood with a hand molded grip for the center handrail and a cylindrical handrail at the walls.

There are service stairs in non-public parts of the building.

A stairway in the room west of the elevator lobby leads to the mezzazine level and has 21 risers of terrazzo

The main mode of vertical transportation is elevator. There are 6 passenger elevators in the central lobby.

Flooring:

Black and beige asphalt tile is used in the elevator lobbies; terrazzo is used in the room to the west of the lobby on the main floor. Carpeting is used extensively in the sales areas on all floors. Asphalt tile is used in non-public areas.

Wall and Ceiling finishes:

Plaster is used in most areas for wall and ceiling surfaces.

Where special effects are desired, the material varies.

The main walls of the elevator lobby on main floor are marble.

They are of St. Genevieve rose marble from St. Genevieve, Missouri, softened by panels of metal and opal glass through which mellow lights gleam. Sycamore paneling is used in the sportswear division and buff colored terra cotta (similar to exterior) is used in the men's division.

In one of the eighteenth C. french rooms the walls are covered with painted murals by George DeWinter. Cork panels are used in the fur atelier.

Doors and doorways:

Various types of doors are used throughout the building. Flush wood fire doors are used in the stairway. They have one small light. There is no trim used. Depending on the "atmosphere" of the particular rooms, the doorways have wood moldings. Three panel doors are used. Arched openings are employed in the eighteenth C. french rooms.

Decorative features, trim, cabinetwork:

The building abounds in richness of materials and details. 13 artists of renown have work in the store. Miss Eleanor Le Maire was directing head of all interior architecture and decoration. Various themes were employed in different sections of the store.

On the first floor: The accessory room - a "flower-like" room of delicate pastel walls, exquisite moderne crystal and glass lighting fixtures. The patterning of the walls consists of panels sans molding with linear configurations and symmetrical motifs that appear to be intentionally violated. Grilles of angular design and leaf patterns cover the air vents.

The sportswear division has a casual atmosphere appropriate for such wares. The fixtures are natural sycamore with copper trimmings and of wild cherry. A large mural by Stojani called "the spirit of sports" occupied the west wall and creates the impression of limitless time and space. In the mural Stojani portrays the "indefinite, emotional qualities rather than definite forms". The composition has linear, angular designs with inlays of gold leaf, silver and mirrors.

The elevator lobby uses brightly polished marble surfaces with wall and ceiling light panels recessed below the surface. The space sparkles through the use of lights and numerous reflective surfaces. The cases are of rosewood, glass and metal.

The other, lesser important rooms on the 1st floor use materials in much the same manner, i.e., to create the appropriate mood for merchandizing.

On the second floor: This floor is somewhat more formal in its decoration. On this level are the eighteenth C. french rooms (the only period decoration in the building with the exception of the small antique room on the first floor), the Directoire room, the Louis XIV and Louis XV rooms. The decorative motifs in these rooms are by George DeWinter. The Louis XV room (Chinoiserie decoration) has a frieze with gold leaf swags and a slightly projecting cornice. The center of the room has a single column with matching frieze and cornice. There is a fireplace with a wood, marble, and brass mantle and appointments. The large wall murals are set in gold painted wood moldings. Done by DeWinter, they contain scenes of a countryside with classical structures in background. They are composite scenes depicting French architectural influence on America. The river in the foreground is supposedly the Mississippi.

The Louis XIV room has wood paneling all around. There is a projecting cornice with leaf and tongue molding, a soffit of some organic design in linear composition, an egg and dart molding, and a plain frieze. The double pilasters have flat corinthian-like capitals; the pedestals correspond to the height of the panel wainscot. All the panels are outlined in gold leaf covered moldings. The two center columns correspond in detail to the pilasters at the walls. The doorways are straight headed and have leaf and flower chains in relief. The air duct grilles have a sun burst motif.

The lingerie room is pastel colored (pink, lime, light blue). Glass strips over gold leaf on 2 sides of the columns add to the linearity of the room. The linear quality of the decoration is picked up in the wall surface treatment. The walls and ceiling are layered in steps with the slight change in surface repeated in subtle patterns. There is no molding to clutter the modern design. The monel cases and nickel furniture also place the emphasis on the modern character of this room.

On the third and fourth floors: These levels are somewhat altered to bring them in fashion with the younger set.

Hardware:

Standard hardware used in the stairway, - butt hinges, brass knobs or lever handles.

There is an absence of notable hardware in most of the store.

Mechanical equipment, lighting:

There is central heating in the building, with some of the original radiators still in place. The fuel is gas (originally oil). The air ducts are now used for the major heating load, with coils placed in the plenums. Air-conditioning was not original, but added later. There was a ventilating system in the early building with fresh air being washed and distributed, then exhausted. It was not redistributed.

Lighting - Electric lighting fixtures were used exclusively. The fixtures were either recessed or hung from the ceiling.

The types of fixtures varied with the decor.

There is a fire sprinkling system in the ceiling of all floors.

SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

General setting:

The building occupies the northern portion of a block bounded by Wilshire Boulevard on the north, Westmoreland Ave on the west, 7th Street on the south, and Wilshire Place on the east. On the southern portion of the site is a 2 story garage (added later). Since there is a slight slope to the site, the upper (open) level corresponds with the main floor of the store, and the lower level opens directly onto 7th Street to the south. The main entrance to the store is from Wilshire Boulevard, and the secondary entrance is from the parking facilities.

Landscaping:

On the North, East and West sides , the building is placed on the building line. Some planter boxes are located at the street. Some trees are set in the parking lot and other forms of vegetation are placed near the building on the south side. All this planting is relatively new and not a part of the original design.

Outbuildings:

The parking structure already mentioned is situated on the southern portion of the site.

Prepared by: Robert C. Giebner, Project Supervisor
HABS, Southern California Project II

Date of Visit: August, 1969

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

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